

EPPC Subcommittee on Instructional Staffing and Scheduling: Recommendations

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The Subcommittee on Instructional Staffing and Scheduling was asked to explore the development of guidelines to help support and strengthen the staffing and scheduling efforts of course-offering units in Arts and Sciences. The subcommittee met four times during the spring of 2017 to discuss five topics—(A) the distribution of class meeting times, (B) the distribution of instructor types across class offerings, (c) the hiring and review of adjunct instructors, (d) the processes through which instructional units, and their faculty, submit curricular information to the registrar and (E) methods for assessing unmet course demand. The subcommittee considered a wide range of relevant statistical data about classes, instructors and students, and also devoted a large portion of the final meeting to a conversation with the registrar. In addition, the subcommittee chair met with representatives of Columbia College, General Studies and the registrar, and reported back on the substance of these meetings. Taking these deliberations and discussions into account, the subcommittee made the following recommendations to EPPC and the faculty of Arts and Sciences:

A. DISTRIBUTION OF CLASS MEETING TIMES. The subcommittee was mindful of the fact that, a few years back, the Classroom Committee formulated a detailed set of guidelines meant to assist course-offering units in making scheduling decisions that would minimize the problem of “bunching” during peak times in the official schedule. There is evidence that some units have taken these guidelines very seriously. But a number of our course-offering units do not seem to have done so yet. Thus, the subcommittee recommends that *(1) every course-offering unit should have a curriculum committee that meets at least twice a year to consider how its courses are distributed across officially available course times in the Schedule of Classes, and (2) each unit’s curriculum committee should seek to avoid the clustering of too many of its courses during peak times, particularly the 10:10 and 11:40 times, and (to a lesser extent) the 2:10 and 2:40 times. Each course-offering unit should be supplied a yearly report showing the actual distribution of class times for the unit. Faculty members and units could then be encouraged to design their teaching schedules in ways that minimize peak-time clustering.*

B. THE DISTRIBUTION OF INSTRUCTOR TYPES ACROSS CLASS OFFERINGS. The subcommittee looked at data that helped provide a good general picture of the distribution and an understanding of just how complex it is. But it was clear that this complexity is a function of the very different kinds of courses that students take. The data showed that, in general, most students are taught by a significant number of ladder-rank faculty over the course of their careers in Arts and Sciences programs. Moreover, the data also revealed that when students are taught by non-ladder rank faculty, current practices are very much in line with relevant and appropriate disciplinary standards and expectations in higher education generally. For instance, language departments generally rely on lecturers-in-discipline at a rate quite similar to that at peer institutions. During its discussions, the subcommittee learned that the PPC is preparing to conduct a careful review of Arts and Sciences policies for lecturers-in-discipline. So here, the subcommittee makes just one recommendation: *each course-offering unit should work collaboratively with the PPC, and with the Arts and Sciences administration, to support the PPC's upcoming study of the hiring, review, and status of Lecturers-in-Discipline.* We offer a separate discussion of the hiring and review of adjuncts in the next section.

C. THE HIRING AND REVIEW OF ADJUNCT INSTRUCTORS. The data reviewed by the subcommittee showed that course-offering units in Arts and Sciences do not make excessive use of adjuncts. The subcommittee also considered anecdotal evidence suggesting that units often rely on adjuncts who are particularly expert on topics that are critical for students in certain programs, and that the expertise of these adjuncts is sometimes a function of the fact that their primary employment responsibilities are not in the academy. But the subcommittee was not able to consider specific information about how departments review the credentials for the adjuncts they hire, the processes they follow in determining whether to re-hire adjuncts they have used or any training they may provide about some of the responsibilities that come with agreeing to teach in a university. Thus, the subcommittee makes the following recommendations: (1) *Arts and Sciences should consider conducting an informal survey of each unit's practices regarding the hiring and review of adjuncts, and (2) departments should be encouraged to develop a comprehensive handbook of campus services, academic structures and academic policies that can be supplied to adjuncts when they are hired.* It is particularly important to remind adjunct instructors that their teaching responsibilities may include writing letters of recommendation, or being available to provide information about academic standing for students whose academic needs (due to a leave, for instance) might extend beyond the official end date of the term.

D. STRENGTHENING COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION WITH THE REGISTRAR. This is one of the most important topics discussed by the subcommittee. It is critical that students have access to information about courses that is correct, concrete and available in a timely fashion. Of course, the process of supplying and publishing that information is necessarily complex. When departments hire new faculty members, for instance, they may not get detailed course information from their new colleague right away. Or, if

staffing needs change because of unexpected leaves, departments may be challenged to adapt to student needs for reliable and timely information. Further, Arts and Sciences is working with complex information systems that may not always communicate with each other as efficiently and effectively as one would like. Given these considerations, the subcommittee makes two recommendations: *(1) course-offering units in Arts and Sciences should communicate in a timely way with the registrar and regularly review the directory of classes, and other information available online, for accuracy and (2) Arts and Sciences administrators should continue to encourage constructive discussion between course-offering units and the registrar.* It is critical that we increase mutual understanding of the challenges and constraints under which we all operate, and consider ways of creating opportunities for constructive innovation in our practices.

E. ASSESSING UNMET COURSE DEMAND. The subcommittee's discussion on this topic was relatively brief, but the subcommittee concluded that simply reviewing recent data about course wait lists may not provide a very helpful picture of the extent of unmet course demand. Informal conversations with representatives of General Studies and Columbia College suggested that reviewing summer school enrollments and requests for Summer Session courses might be a better place to begin. Thus, the subcommittee makes two recommendations: *(1) discussion of unmet course demand should begin with detailed consultations with Directors of Undergraduate Studies and the Advising Deans, and (2) a careful study of waitlist practices and policies may be a useful supplement to information gained from discussions with the Directors of Undergraduate Studies and with Advising Deans.*